



WHO warns that new virus variant poses 'very high' risk

By JAMEY KEATEN,
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MARI YAMAGUCHI
Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization warned Monday that the global risk from the omicron variant is "very high" based on early evidence, saying the mutated coronavirus could lead to surges with "severe consequences."

The U.N. health agency, in a technical paper issued to member states, said "considerable uncertainties" remain about the variant that was first detected days ago in southern Africa. But it said it is possible the variant has mutations that could enable it to escape an immune-system response and boost its ability to spread from one person to another. "Depending on these characteristics, there could be future surges of COVID-19, which could have severe consequences, depending on a number of factors, including where surges may take place," it added. "The overall global risk ... is assessed as very high."

The warning came as a widening circle of countries around the world reported cases of the variant and moved to slam their doors shut while scientists race to figure out just how dangerous this version might be.



People pass through Waterloo train station, in London, during the morning rush hour, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021.

Associated Press

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Continued from Front

Japan announced it would bar entry of all foreign visitors, joining Israel in doing so just days after the variant was identified by researchers in South Africa. Morocco banned all incoming flights. Other countries, including the U.S. and European Union members, have moved to prohibit travelers arriving from southern Africa.

If the virus proves dangerous as feared, "the impact on vulnerable populations would be substantial, particularly in countries with low vaccination coverage," WHO said, noting that no deaths linked to omicron have been reported so far.

Spain became one of the latest countries to report its first confirmed case of the variant. While the vast majority of infections have been seen in travelers arriving from abroad, cases in Portugal and Scotland have raised fears that the variant may already be spreading locally.

"Many of us might think we are done with COVID-19. It's not done with us," warned Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's director-general. Days after the variant sent a shudder through the financial world nearly two years into the pandemic that has killed over 5 million people, markets had mixed reactions Monday, with Euro-



People line up for vaccination against the coronavirus and the COVID-19 disease at a mobile vaccination bus in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021.

Associated Press

pean stocks and oil prices rebounding and Wall Street opening higher, while Asian markets fell further.

U.S. President Joe Biden called the omicron variant a cause for concern but "not a cause for panic." He said he is not considering any widespread U.S. lockdown and instead urged vaccinations and mask-wearing. The infections have underscored the difficulty in keeping the virus in check in a globalized world of jet travel and open borders. Yet, many countries are trying to do just that, against the urging of the WHO, which noted that border closings often have limited effect and can wreak havoc on lives and livelihoods.

Some argued that such restrictions could provide valuable time to analyze the new variant. Little is known about it, including whether it is more contagious, more likely to cause serious illness or more able to evade vaccines.

While the initial global re-

sponse to COVID-19 was criticized as slow and haphazard, the reaction to the new variant came quickly.

"This time the world showed it is learning," said EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, singling out South African President Cyril Ramaphosa for praise. "South Africa's analytic work and transparency and sharing its results was indispensable in allowing a swift global response. It no doubt saved many lives."

Late last week, von der Leyen successfully pushed the 27-nation EU to agree to ban flights from seven southern African nations, similar to what many other countries are doing.

Cases had already been reported in EU nations Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands before Portuguese authorities identified 13 omicron infections among members of the Belenenses professional soccer team. Authorities reported one member had recently traveled to South Africa. A game over the

weekend had been abandoned at halftime for lack of players.

Spain's first document case was detected in a traveler who returned Sunday from South Africa after making a stopover in Amsterdam, one of Madrid's major public hospitals tweeted.

And after Scotland reported its first six cases, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon warned that "there might already be some community transmission of this variant." Taking no chances, Japan, which has yet to detect any omicron cases, reimposed border controls that it had eased earlier this month. "We are taking the step as an emergency precaution to prevent a worst-case scenario in Japan," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said. The new measures begin Tuesday.

Israel likewise decided to bar entry to foreigners, and Morocco said it would suspend all incoming flights for two weeks starting Monday.

And Britain expanded its

COVID-19 booster program to everyone 18 and older, making millions more people eligible. Up until now, booster shots were available only to those 40 and over and people particularly vulnerable to the virus. The U.K. has reported about a dozen omicron cases.

Despite the global worry, scientists cautioned that it is still unclear whether omicron is more alarming than other versions.

So far, doctors in South Africa are reporting patients are suffering mostly mild symptoms, but they warn that it is still early. Also, most of the new cases are in people in their 20s and 30s, who generally do not get as sick from COVID-19 as older patients.

"We've seen a sharp increase in cases for the past 10 days. So far they have mostly been very mild cases, with patients having flu-like symptoms: dry coughs, fever, night sweats, a lot of body pains," said Dr. Unben Pillay, a general practitioner in Gauteng province, where 81% of the new cases have been reported. The variant has provided further proof of what experts have long been saying: that no continent will be safe until the whole globe has been sufficiently vaccinated. The more the virus is allowed to spread, the more opportunities it has to mutate.

"The emergence of the omicron variant has fulfilled, in a precise way, the predictions of the scientists who warned that the elevated transmission of the virus in areas with limited access to vaccine would speed its evolution," said Dr. Richard Hatchett, head of CEPI, one of the founders of the U.N.-backed global vaccine sharing initiative COVAX. □



Jan. 6 panel sets contempt vote for former DOJ official

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A House committee investigating the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection will vote Wednesday to hold a former Justice Department official in contempt, seeking criminal charges against a defiant witness for a second time after holding former White House aide Steve Bannon in contempt last month.

The committee on Monday scheduled a vote to pursue contempt charges against Jeffrey Clark, a former Justice Department lawyer who aligned with President Donald Trump as he tried to overturn his defeat. Clark appeared for a deposition Nov. 5 but told lawmakers that he would not answer questions based partly on Trump's legal efforts to block the committee's investigation.

The vote will come as the panel is also considering contempt charges against former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who was Trump's top aide the day that hundreds of his supporters violently attacked the U.S. Capitol and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory. Meadows was sub-

poenaed in September but has not yet sat for an interview with the committee.

The panel has vowed to aggressively seek charges against any witness who doesn't comply as they investigate the worst attack on the Capitol in two centuries, and the Justice Department has signaled it is willing to pursue those charges, indicting Bannon earlier this month on two federal counts of criminal contempt. Attorney General Merrick Garland said then that Bannon's indictment reflects the department's "steadfast commitment" to the rule of law after Bannon outright defied the committee and refused to cooperate.

Clark's case could be more complicated since he did appear for his deposition and, unlike Bannon, was a Trump administration official on Jan. 6. Trump has sued to block the committee's work and has attempted to assert executive privilege over documents and interviews, arguing that his conversations and actions at the time should be shielded from public view.

A report issued by Democrats on the Senate Judicial

Committee detailed how Clark championed Trump's efforts to undo the election results and clashed as a result with Justice Department superiors who resisted the pressure, culminating in a dramatic White House meeting at which Trump ruminated about elevating Clark to attorney general. He did not do so after several aides threatened to resign.

In a somewhat similar case, the Justice Department in 2015 declined to prosecute former IRS official Lois Lerner on contempt of Congress charges after Lerner delivered an opening statement at a hearing but then repeatedly declined to answer questions from lawmakers, citing her Fifth Amendment right to not incriminate herself.

This time, though, the Justice Department is considering the charges against a former administration official, not a current official. With little precedent to go on, it's unclear what the department will do.

Clark is one of more than 40 people the committee has subpoenaed so far. The committee's chairman, Mississippi Rep. Bennie Thompson, wrote in Clark's



Acting Assistant U.S. Attorney General Jeffrey Clark speaks as he stands next to Deputy Attorney General Jeffrey A. Rosen during a news conference at the Justice Department in Washington, Oct. 21, 2020.

Associated Press

subpoena that the committee's probe "has revealed credible evidence that you attempted to involve the Department of Justice in efforts to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power" and his efforts "risked involving the Department of Justice in actions that lacked evidentiary foundation and threatened to subvert the rule of law."

After Clark refused to answer questions, Thompson said it was "astounding that someone who so recently held a position of public trust to uphold the Constitution would now hide behind vague claims of privi-

lege by a former President, refuse to answer questions about an attack on our democracy, and continue an assault on the rule of law." Despite Trump's false claims about a stolen election — the primary motivation for the violent mob that broke into the Capitol and interrupted the certification of Biden's victory — the results were confirmed by state officials and upheld by the courts. Trump's own attorney general, William Barr, had said the Justice Department found no evidence of widespread fraud that could have changed the results. □



Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt speaks during a news conference in St. Louis on Aug. 6, 2020.

Associated Press

By DAVID A. LIEB
Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — A federal judge on Monday blocked President Joe Biden's administration from enforcing a coronavirus vaccine mandate on thousands of health care workers in 10 states that had brought the first legal

challenge against the requirement.

The court order said that the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid had no clear authority from Congress to enact the vaccine mandate for providers participating in the two government health care programs for the el-

Biden vaccine rule for health workers blocked in 10 states

derly, disabled and poor. The preliminary injunction by St. Louis-based U.S. District Judge Matthew Schelp applies to a coalition of suing states that includes Alaska, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming. Similar lawsuits also are pending in other states.

The federal rule requires COVID-19 vaccinations for more than 17 million workers nationwide in about 76,000 health care facilities and home health care providers that get funding from the government health programs. Workers are to receive their first dose by Dec. 6 and their

second shot by Jan. 4. The court order against the health care vaccine mandate comes after Biden's administration suffered a similar setback for a broader policy. A federal court previously placed a hold on a separate rule requiring businesses with more than 100 employees to ensure their workers get vaccinated or else wear masks and get tested weekly for the coronavirus.

Biden's administration contends federal rules supersede state policies prohibiting vaccine mandates and are essential to slowing the pandemic. But the judge in the health care provider case wrote

that federal officials likely overstepped their legal powers.

"CMS seeks to overtake an area of traditional state authority by imposing an unprecedented demand to federally dictate the private medical decisions of millions of Americans. Such action challenges traditional notions of federalism," Schelp wrote in his order.

Even under an exceedingly broad interpretation of federal powers, "Congress did not clearly authorize CMS to enact the this politically and economically vast, federalism-altering, and boundary-pushing mandate," Schelp wrote. □

New details on Chris Cuomo's role advising brother Andrew

By **MICHAEL R. SISAK**
and **MARINA VILLENEUVE**
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Transcripts released Monday shed new light on CNN anchor Chris Cuomo's behind-the-scenes role advising his brother, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, in the face of sexual harassment allegations that forced him from office.

Chris Cuomo told investigators he spoke regularly with his brother, exchanged text messages with his top advisers and was looped in on emails in February in March as they formulated a response to allegations from multiple women.

He also offered to help try and find out through his "sources" whether more women were going to come forward, including possibly learning their identities.

Chris Cuomo's role as his brother's unofficial adviser was previously known. After some details of his work were highlighted in an August report by state Attorney General Letitia James, the journalist acknowledged it was a "mistake" to have joined in strategy calls with a group of his brother's advisers.

But a transcript of Chris Cuomo's July interview with investigators, as well as the release of 169 pages of emails, text messages and other communications



New York Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo appears during a news conference about COVID-19 at the State Capitol in Albany, N.Y., on Dec. 3, 2020, left, and CNN anchor Chris Cuomo attends the 12th annual CNN Heroes: An All-Star Tribute at the American Museum of Natural History in New York on Dec. 9, 2018.

offer more detail on his involvement in shaping his brother's message — and acting as a bulldog sparring with top aides over strategy.

"I was worried that this wasn't being handled the right way, and it's not my job to handle it, okay?" Chris Cuomo testified. "I don't work for the governor. I'm not defending him in this matter. I'm not covering it. You know, this is — this is not what I do."

"I am worried about my brother and worried that this is being handled the

best way it can. And my feeling was that, to my basic mantra, you need to tell the truth and get in front of these if you have something to say. And if you have something to own, you need to do that as well," he said.

Andrew Cuomo resigned in August to avoid a likely impeachment trial, in the wake of an independent investigation that found he sexually harassed at least 11 women.

Chris Cuomo, the host of CNN's "Cuomo Prime Time," has defended him-

self by saying he never reported on Cuomo's situation for CNN and never tried to influence coverage.

"I tried to do the right thing," the host said on-air in August, adding that he "wasn't in control of anything."

A message to CNN representatives for comment was not immediately returned.

The transcript of Chris Cuomo's interview was part of a new batch of materials released Monday by the attorney general's of-

fice, gathered during its monthslong investigation into the governor's conduct with women.

A copy of Gov. Cuomo's video testimony was released for the first time. Transcripts of it had previously been made public.

The attorney general also released transcripts or videos of interviews with several of Cuomo's key aides and advisors, who described their efforts to defend him against harassment allegations.

The governor's former top aide, Melissa DeRosa, wiped away tears as she told investigators about a tense conversation she had in a car with Cuomo when she confronted him about his interactions with a former aide, Charlotte Bennett, who said she felt like the governor was hitting on her. Bennett said he also made her uncomfortable with unwanted comments about her experience as a sexual assault survivor.

"I can't believe you put yourself in a situation where you would be having any version of this conversation," DeRosa said, recalling what she said to Cuomo.

DeRosa said the car stopped at a traffic light and she got out of the car. DeRosa said after Bennett's allegations, the governor's office no longer left Cuomo alone with junior staff. □

Associated Press

Journalist freed by Myanmar helps light menorah in Detroit



American journalist Danny Fenster speaks at a news conference at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York Tuesday, Nov. 16, 2021, after arriving in the United States following a six month detention in Myanmar.

Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — An American journalist who was re-

cently freed after spending nearly six months in jail

in military-ruled Myanmar helped light one of eight Hanukkah candles during a holiday celebration in downtown Detroit.

Danny Fenster, 37, joined elected and community leaders Sunday night for the "Menorah in the D" event marking the start of Hanukkah.

Fenster, who is from the Detroit suburb of Huntington Woods, was handed over Nov. 15 by Myanmar to former U.S. diplomat Bill Richardson, who helped negotiate his release. He returned to the U.S. the following day.

Fenster, the managing

editor of online magazine Frontier Myanmar, is one of more than 100 journalists, media officials and publishers who have been detained in the Southeast Asian country since its military ousted the elected government in February. He was arrested on May 24 at Yangon International Airport and convicted of spreading false or inflammatory information, contacting illegal organizations and violating visa regulations. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison with hard labor. "It wasn't a theme I thought about before the timing of my release and

the timing of this event, but I think there's that obvious connection with bringing light to darkness in journalism," Fenster, who is Jewish, told the Detroit Free Press.

"The things that I was arrested for, being part of the news organization that's trying to shed light on a very dark regime, seems obviously resonant to me."

"And it's just made an already great, joyful situation even more joyful. Just had a lot of love and appreciation back home here in Detroit and metro Detroit, in the Jewish community and the wider community. It's just been incredible." □

Talks to revive Iran nuclear deal resume; U.S. stays distant

By KIYOKO METZLER

Associated Press

VIENNA (AP) — Negotiators in Vienna resumed talks Monday over reviving Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, with the United States taking part at arm's length as in previous rounds since the Trump administration pulled out of the accord three years ago. Hopes of quick progress were muted after a hard-line new government in Tehran led to a more than five-month hiatus in negotiations. But the European Union official chairing the talks sounded an upbeat note after the first meeting concluded.

"I feel positive that we can be doing important things for the next weeks," EU diplomat Enrique Mora told reporters.

All participants showed a willingness to listen to the positions and "sensibilities" of the new Iranian delegation, Mora said. At the same time, Tehran's team made clear it wanted to engage in "serious work" to bring the accord back to life, he said.

The remaining signatories to the nuclear deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — Iran, Russia, China, France, Germany and Britain — convened at the Palais Coburg, a luxury hotel where the agreement was signed six years ago.

A U.S. delegation headed



The Arak heavy water nuclear facilities, near the central city of Arak, 150 miles (250 kilometers) southwest of the capital Tehran, Iran, Jan. 15, 2011.

by the Biden administration's special envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, stayed at a nearby hotel where it was being briefed on the talks by diplomats from the other countries.

President Joe Biden has signaled he wants to rejoin the talks. The last round, aimed at bringing Iran back into compliance with the agreement and paving the way for the U.S. to re-join, was held in June.

"There is a sense of urgency in putting an end to the suffering of the Iranian people," said Mora, referring to the crippling sanctions the U.S. re-imposed on Iran when it quit the accord.

"And there is a sense of urgency in putting the Iranian nuclear program under the transparent monitoring of the international community," he said.

"What has been the norm over the first six rounds will be again the practice in this seventh round," Mora added. "Nothing new on working methods."

The United States left the deal under then-President Donald Trump's "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran in 2018.

The nuclear deal saw Iran limit its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Since the deal's collapse,

Iran now enriches small amounts of uranium up to 60% purity — a short step from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran also spins advanced centrifuges barred by the accord, and its uranium stockpile now far exceeds the accord's limits. Iran maintains its atomic program is peaceful. However, U.S. intelligence agencies and international inspectors say Iran had an organized nuclear weapons program up until 2003. Nonproliferation experts fear the brinkmanship could push Tehran toward even more extreme measures to try to force the West to lift sanctions.

Making matters more difficult, United Nations nuclear inspectors remain unable to fully monitor Iran's program after Tehran limited their access. A trip to Iran last week by the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi, failed to make any progress on that issue.

Russia's top representative, Mikhail Ulyanov, said he held "useful" informal consultations with officials from Iran and China on Sunday. That meeting, he said, was aimed at "better understanding ... the updated negotiating position of Tehran." He tweeted a picture of a meeting Monday he described as a preparatory session with members before Iran joined the discussions.

A delegation appointed by new Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is joining the negotiations for the first time. Iran has made maximalist demands, including calls for the U.S. to unfreeze \$10 billion in assets as an initial goodwill gesture, a tough line that might be an opening gambit.

Ali Bagheri, an Iranian nuclear negotiator, told Iranian state television late Sunday that the Islamic republic "has entered the talks with serious willpower and strong preparation." However, he cautioned that "we cannot anticipate a timeframe on the length of these talks now." □

Israeli Supreme Court: Cable car survivor to return to Italy

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court on Monday upheld lower court rulings in the bitter custody battle surrounding a 6-year-old boy who survived a cable car crash in Italy, saying he should be returned to his relatives there within two weeks. Eitan Biran has been the focus of a legal battle between his paternal relatives in Italy and his maternal family in Israel since surviving the May 23 cable car crash, which killed 14 people, including his parents and younger brother.

Eitan and his parents were living in Italy at the time of the accident. After his release from a Turin hospital following weeks of treatment, Italian juvenile court officials ruled the child would live with a paternal aunt, Aya Biran, near Pavia, in northern Italy.

His maternal grandfather, Shmulik Peleg, then spirited him away without the knowledge of the relatives in Italy, taking him across the border into Switzerland by car and then flying him to Israel on a private jet.

Peleg has said he acted in the child's best interest.

The Peleg family said it would continue to fight "in every legal way" to return the child to Israel. It was not immediately clear what legal options were available following the Supreme Court ruling.

Earlier this month, an Italian judge issued an arrest warrant for Gabriel Abutbul Alon, who is accused of having driven the car on Sept. 11 that spirited Eitan from his home near Pavia to Switzerland. Alon was ar-



Aya Biran, a paternal aunt of 6-year-old Eitan Biran, who survived a cable car crash in Italy that killed his immediate family, leaves court in Tel Aviv, Sept. 23, 2021.

Associated Press

rested in Cyprus last week. Peleg was also named in the arrest warrant. The boy's family in Italy said

they were happy with the Supreme Court decision, calling it "just and awaited." □

Belarusian leader accuses Lithuania of dumping dead migrants

By VLADIMIR ISACHENKOV

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko on Monday accused Lithuanian authorities of dumping the bodies of migrants on the border between the two countries — a claim rejected by Lithuania amid soaring border tensions between Belarus and its European Union neighbors.

Lukashenko also warned that his country will stand squarely behind its ally Russia if the Ukrainian authorities launch an offensive against Moscow-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine. He tried to cast the tensions over migrants as part of a purported Western plot against Belarus and Russia.

Lukashenko said at a meeting with his top military brass that Belarusian border guards found the bodies of two migrants left on the border over the weekend. "They put a dead body, or, probably, a person who is still alive, in a sleeping bag and toss it on the border," Lukashenko exclaimed. "What an abomination!"

Lithuania's State Border Guard Service rejected the Belarusian claim, saying that Belarusian authorities have repeatedly tried to stage and direct beatings, the crippling or even deaths



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko attends a meeting with top level military officials in Minsk, Belarus, Monday, Nov. 22, 2021.

Associated Press

of migrants, while blaming Lithuania for such "inhumane treatment."

Lukashenko also charged Monday that Belarusian border guards also found several other freezing migrants who were barely alive at an abandoned farmhouse near the border with Lithuania.

The EU has accused Lukashenko of waging a "hybrid attack" against the bloc, using desperate migrants as pawns and tricking them into trying to cross into EU members Poland and Lithu-

ania to destabilize the entire bloc. The EU says that is Lukashenko's revenge for EU sanctions imposed on Belarus after its brutal crackdown on democracy protesters.

Belarusian authorities have denied the accusations and shot back at the EU, accusing it of failing to offer safe passage to migrants. Since Nov. 8, a large group of migrants, mostly Iraqi Kurds, has been stranded in Belarus at a border crossing with Poland, trapped amid freezing temperatures as

forces from the two countries face off. Most of the migrants are fleeing conflict or hopelessness at home, and aim to reach Germany or other Western European countries.

On Monday, Lukashenko had a call with Russian President Vladimir Putin in which they talked about the situation on Belarus' border with Poland, according to the Kremlin.

The Belarusian leader also ordered military officials Monday to raise troop readiness in view of NATO

maneuvers near Belarusian borders.

Lukashenko dismissed Western concerns about alleged Russian plans to invade Ukraine, which also borders Belarus, saying that Moscow would have let him know about it if it had such intentions. But echoing statements from the Kremlin, he warned Ukrainian authorities that if they try to use force to reclaim areas controlled by Russia-backed separatists in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland known as Donbas, Belarus would stand squarely with Russia.

"If they try to launch a small war in Donbas or somewhere on the border with Russia, Belarus will not stay aside, and it's clear whose side it will take," he said.

Belarusian Defense Minister Lt. Gen. Viktor Khrenin said in the "medium term" Belarus and Russia will conduct joint drills to protect Belarus' border with Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities have voiced concerns that Russian troops could use Belarusian territory to invade Ukraine.

The Kremlin has denied plans to launch such attack and accused Ukrainian authorities and their Western backers of making the claims to cover up their own allegedly aggressive designs. □



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, addresses the media as he arrives to attend the opening day of the winter session of Parliament in New Delhi, India, Monday, Nov. 29, 2021.

Associated Press

By KRUTIKA PATHI

Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian lawmakers on Monday repealed agricultural legisla-

tion that provoked a year of nationwide protests from farmers, in a move that was seen as a major reversal and rare climbdown for

Indian lawmakers repeal farm reforms after year of protests

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which had ardently defended the controversial reforms.

The Farm Laws Repeal bill passed the lower and upper houses of Parliament with scant debate — ten days after Modi announced the surprise decision to withdraw the three laws in a televised national address.

Protesting farmers have hunkered down in makeshift camps outside the capital of New Delhi since November of last year to demand the removal of the laws, which they fear would drastically shrink their incomes.

The repeal bill will need to be signed by the president before it is formally implemented.

But farmers have said their demonstrations will continue — just last week, thousands of jubilant farmers on tractors, jeeps and cars, waved green and white flags as they rode along highways ringing New Delhi to celebrate their victory, but made it clear that the government has not met all of their demands.

Rakesh Tikait, a top farmer leader, said that they needed government assurances of guaranteed prices for certain essential crops, like wheat and rice — a system

introduced in the 1960s to help India shore up its food reserves and prevent shortages.

He demanded that the government set up a committee to settle these demands before the farmers consider ending their protests.

Farmers form one of India's most influential voting blocs. Modi's decision to scrap the new laws came ahead of elections early next year in key states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, both significant agricultural producers and where his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is eager to shore up its support. □

Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, Honduras' 1st female president?

By **MARLON GONZALEZ**

Associated Press

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) —

Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the wife of ousted former president Mel Zelaya, has taken a commanding lead in Honduras' elections, capping a 12-year effort. If preliminary tallies from the election Sunday are confirmed, Castro de Zelaya would become the Central American country's first female president. Her victory would also mark the return of her family to the presidential residence that they were ousted from in a 2009 coup.

The 62-year-old, three-time candidate has long said, "the third try is the charm." She grew up in the capital, Tegucigalpa, but moved to her husband's rural province of Olancho, known for its cattle ranches, when the couple wed.

Together they raised four children, and during her husband's 2006-2009 tenure, she played a relatively minor role, overseeing programs for women and children. But it was after the 2009 coup, which forced her husband into exile, that Castro de Zelaya came to the forefront. With Mel Zelaya running a sort of government in exile in Costa Rica and later in Nicaragua, it was up to his wife to lead the string of protests demanding his return and re-instatement.

By the time Zelaya formed the Libre, or Free Party, Castro de Zelaya's popularity was evident among followers of the movement. Besides, the country's Constitution prohibited her husband from running for re-election. Since 2013, the first time she ran, Castro de Zelaya has been the princi-

pal thorn in the side of Juan Orlando Hernández, the current president who won elections in 2013, and then gained the blessings of the country's supreme court to run for re-election in 2017. Castro de Zelaya ceded her candidacy in 2017 to Salvador Nasralla, a TV personality who ran at the head of an opposition coalition, and claimed to have narrowly defeated Hernández.

After a protracted election filled with irregularities in 2017, protesters filled the streets and the government imposed a curfew. Three weeks later, Hernández was declared the winner despite the Organization of American States observation mission calling for an election re-do. At least 23 people were killed.

Since then, Castro de Zelaya's movement has fo-



Free Party presidential candidate Xiomara Castro has her hand raised by her running mate Salvador Nasralla after general elections, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

cused laser-like on getting Hernández out of office.

Hernández became a national embarrassment with U.S. federal prosecutors in New York accusing him of running a narco state and fueling his own political rise with drug money. Hernández has denied it all and has not been formally charged, but that could change once he leaves office. Castro de Zelaya sees it as a campaign to free her country.

"Honduras has been described as a narco-state

because of the mafia that governs us, and we have also been described as the most corrupt country in Latin America," Castro de Zelaya said at a recent campaign event. "People of Honduras, now is the time to say enough of the misery, poverty and exclusion that our country suffers."

But Castro de Zelaya will also have to overcome distrust caused by Mel Zelaya's sometimes headstrong and erratic governing style during his 2006-2009 administration. □

Barbados prepares to bid farewell to queen as head of state

By **DÁNICA COTO**

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) —

The Caribbean island of Barbados on Monday prepared to wave goodbye to Queen Elizabeth II as head of state as it cuts ties with its colonial past and becomes a republic for the first time in history.

The preparations come a month after the Parliament of the former British colony once nicknamed "Little England" elected its first ever president in a two-thirds majority vote. Thousands of people were expected to watch the late-night event on TV, listen to it on the radio or see it in person at a popular square where the statue of a well-known British lord was removed last year amid a world-wide push to eradicate symbols of oppression.

"It should be a historic moment," said Denis Edwards, a property manager who was born in Guyana but lives in Barbados.

His son was born on the island, so Edwards said he plans to take him to see the once-in-a-lifetime event: "He's a Bajan."

The most high-profile guest will be Prince Charles, who arrived Sunday in Barbados, an island of more than 300,000 people and one of the wealthier nations in the Caribbean, dependent on tourism, manufacturing and finance. The Prince of Wales was greeted with a 21-gun salute and is scheduled to speak ahead of the president-elect.

Barbados Governor General Sandra Mason, who was appointed by the queen, is scheduled to be sworn in as president shortly after midnight on Tuesday, which marks the island's 55th independence from Britain.

In a speech to Parliament last month, she said the move to become a republic should not be seen as a condemnation of anyone and that Barbados looked forward to

continuing its relationship with the British monarch.

Prime Minister Mia Mottley praised the vote at the time, saying, "We have just elected among us a woman who is uniquely and passionately Barbadian....I can think therefore of no better person at this juncture of our nation."

Mottley added that the "responsibilities and rights come with the understanding that there is no one else to look over us... This is our moment."

Mason, 72, is an attorney and judge who also has served as ambassador to Venezuela, Colombia, Chile and Brazil.

Barbados has slowly distanced itself from its colonial past after gaining independence from the United Kingdom in November 1966, more than three hundred centuries after English settlers arrived and turned the island into a wealthy sugar colony based on the work of hundreds of thousands of African slaves. □

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PALM BEACH — MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers has improved its services when it comes to turn around time for results. As of today it's offering same day test results (previously it was 24 hours) on both PCR and Antigen tests.

This in part is to comply with the updated November 8th CDC requirement for travel to the United States. Where vaccinated travelers need to test three days prior to travel and unvaccinated travelers one day prior.

MedCare Fit2Fly Testing Center at the Cove Mall is opposite the Holiday Inn and is open every day for walk-ins from 8 AM through 6 PM. MedCare's other location is situated at The Courtyard by Marriott Aruba Resort, is across the street from the RIU Hotel and is



open every day from 8:00 AM until 2 PM. These two locations are at a stone's throw from your resort, condominium, or other vacation accommodation. Walk-ins are welcome.

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- Renaissance Wind Creek Aruba Resort
- The Ritz-Carlton Resort.

Please contact your front desk for more information on our Testing Centers at these properties.

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Article by Etnia Nativa

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Etnia Nativa is close to high rise Hotels



Aruba beyond beaches

Episode CXXXII -132

Every week we share the most interesting and insightful articles about Aruba as a destination to explore and conserve. Discover amazing and informative stories to enrich your knowledge and experience. There is so much to admire on this tiny island such as the variety of the landscape and its differences which is the result of the weather resistance of different types of rocks.

We can differentiate three basic geological formations. One is a hilly part, second by an undulating part and a third part consisting of limestone which embraces these two zones mentioned before and forming also the coast line. The landscape of Sta. Cruz, Tanki Flip, Noord area and in the south of

Savaneta is mostly flat to slightly undulating with quartz diorite (QD) boulders in it. This rock is has a gray color with dark and light speckled, and is relatively hard. These are many areas with boulders and small or large patches of sand and vegetation. The Hooiberg elevates to 166 m, a conical-shaped hill west of Santa Cruz and is situated in the middle of the typical QD landscape. The main component of this hill is of volcanic formation called Hooibergite. Other geological phenomena in the QD landscape are the small hills at the north coast and areas of our by law protected dunes prohibiting the incursion of all types of motorized vehicles.

A curious fact is that our dunes where manly



formed by the feeding habits of various types of parrotfish who bites of the living coral to extract the animal juices inside, while spit out the crushed calcium in to a fine sand, that the wind on its part accumulates as dunes behind our north coast beaches.

The dunes are well drained, often dry, and are composed also of calcium carbonate from eroded seashells. Decomposing sea algae, brought in by stormy weather, adds nutrients to allow pioneer species to colonize them.

In these white dunes and desert landscape we find some hardy flora

species that are perfectly adapted to the aridity of the soil, the mobility of the loose sandy substrate, the low nutrients and the salinity, elements ideal to sustain the halophyte plant communities that survive in these extreme soil conditions of high saline content.

Some of these pioneering species are the "Sesuvium portulacastrum" or "Tobacco di piscado" (fishermans tabaco), in our native Papiamentu, the "cocorobana" "Tournefortia gnaphalodes" also known by the name of "sea lavender" and sea grapes, Cocoloba uvifera. The predominant fauna of these coastal dunes are insects such as bees, wasps and ants, beetles, spider flies, sea birds and also lizards.

As we move away from the sea, the intensity of the wind, the salt spray and the mobility of the substrate are reduced. This makes the environmental conditions less extreme, which is used by a greater number of species. □

Did you say that you love Aruba its origins and cultural heritage? Than this private encounter with our columnist anthropologist is just as you. Sessions created in a gorgeous setting for visitor with special interests. Appointment is required. etnianaativa03@gmail.com or Whatsapp us 297 592 2702 for a private reservation.



Long time employees reflect resort's singular style Playa Linda Celebrates its Dream Team



Anniversary Group



Kirk McKenzie



Lourdes Croes-Bello



Maria Trimon Maduro



Alvaro Gonzalez



Lisette Ras



GM Peter van Grinsven

PALM BEACH – The holiday season kicked off to a festive start at the Playa Linda Beach Resort with a celebration of valued team members who marked a milestone work anniversary this year. A recent anniversary lunch, held appropriately on Thanksgiving Day, was made even more joyous in being able to gather together to recognize accomplishments and share in well-deserved recognition. It has been the combined talents of Playa Linda's long time employees that have helped guarantee the delivery of an outstanding vacation experience even during the height of unusual times.

Many of the honorees are well known to return members and guests of the Playa Linda and have proven skilled at making an indelible impression on even first time visitors. Topping this year's list is Alvaro Gonzalez whose career at the Playa Linda spans an impressive 35 years as an integral part of Membership Accounting. The level of dedication demonstrated by Maira Trimon-Maduro throughout her 30 years in Housekeeping proves why Playa Linda's largest department is indeed the "heart of the house". Lourdes Croes Bello, representing Housekeeping as well, but also well known for her past role at the Front Desk, is another favorite of guests with 25 years on

the job. Most well known among visitors may be Kirk McKenzie, a long time employee with Grounds and a familiar face on the beach, who, after 25 years, still demonstrates an unflagging energy, helpful hand and infectious friendliness.

This year's group of 18 honorees represents a combined total of 280 years of know-how and hospitality acumen. Playa Linda's own General Manager Peter van Grinsven is among the 20-year honorees that also includes Belquis Francisco Almonte from Housekeeping, Miangely Faro from Membership Accounting and Engineering's Pedro Ogando-Amparo and Gerald Naar. Celebrating 15 years with the Playa Linda are Hubert Ridderstaat from Engineering and Luders Cadevil from Grounds. Also represented this year are many 5-year employees who in a relatively short amount of time have made a big impact and include Pauline Taylor-Dijo from Activities, Jacob de Mey from Accounting, Rousanne de Weever from HR, Yolaime Valencia Lopez from Loss Prevention as well as Reservations' well-oiled team of Monique Hodge, Solange Croes and Lisette Ras. All honorees received a plaque, the customary envelope and gratitude for individual contributions that cement the foundation of what

helps set the Playa Linda Beach Resort apart as a top choice for an Aruba stay.

Alvaro Gonzalez, who after working with Playa Linda for 35 years, sums it up best, as to what makes the resort so special for both employees as well as members and guests. "We all belong to an extended Playa Linda family. Since the inception of the resort, through its construction phase through the many upgrades that followed, Playa Linda has its own unique style that distinguishes us from other timeshares and resorts on the island, which combined with its excellent location, truly creates a special, singular 'home away from home' environment for everyone."

Playa Linda Beach Resort Aruba sits beachside on world famous Palm Beach, and at the center of the island's best selection of dining, shopping and activity options. It's 215 spacious suites -- featuring nine different suite categories, each with fully-equipped kitchens -- and resort amenities including on-property laundry facilities, two pools, two Jacuzzis, concierge services, daily activity program and varied dining and shopping options, create an upscale, community-centered environment for families, couples and friend groups seeking Aruba hospitality at its finest.

Liz Weston: How to maximize your 'health span'

By **LIZ WESTON**
of NerdWallet

We're living longer on average, but the number of years we're healthy hasn't kept up. This lagging "health span" translates into more time living with serious illness and disabilities at the end of our lives. This can have significant repercussions for our retirements. Some of us will have our working lives cut short by ill health, reducing how much money we can save for our futures. Others will face big bills for medical and nursing home care. Then there is the emotional toll of struggling with poor health rather than traveling, visiting the grandkids and engaging in all the other activities we'd planned for our golden years.

It doesn't necessarily have to be this way. Many of the biggest risk factors for poor health are within our power to modify, prevent or control, says R. Dale Hall, managing director of the Society of Actuaries Research Institute, which provides research on managing risks. But as with retirement saving, the earlier we get started, the better.

LEARN THE 5 HEALTH SPAN RISK FACTORS

The institute commissioned Vitality, a company that partners with insurers and employers to promote healthier living, to conduct a study that identified five lifestyle risk factors with the largest impact on health span: tobacco use, obe-

sity, high blood sugar, poor diet and high blood pressure.

The researchers also highlighted ways to modify those risks, including quitting smoking, engaging in physical activity, eating a healthy diet and taking medications as prescribed. The study relied on data from the Global Burden of Disease, a resource maintained by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation that tracks the prevalence of diseases and risk factors worldwide, along with the relative harm they cause. The GBD shows average remaining life expectancy at age 65 in the U.S. rose from 17.6 years in 1990 to 19.6 years in 2019 — a two-year gain. Healthy life expectancy, on the other hand, rose less than one year, from 12.2 years to 13.1 years.

That echoes similar statistics from the World Health Organization, which found that U.S. life expectancy at age 60 rose nearly 8% between 2000 and 2019, but healthy life expectancy rose less than 5%.

RECOGNIZE OTHER BARRIERS TO HEALTHIER LIVING

The GBD has some limitations: It doesn't track the impact of well-established prevention strategies such as immunizations and screenings, or account for risk factors such as stress, depression, lack of sleep, loneliness and lack of purpose, the Vitality researchers said.

It's also important to acknowledge that there can be huge systemic barriers to healthier living. If you live in an area with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, it's harder to eat well. If you live in crowded housing in an unsafe neighborhood, getting enough exercise can be tough. If you must choose between buying medication and food, you're unlikely to fill the prescription your doctor wrote for you — assuming you can afford to visit a doctor. The more money you have, the better access you have to the key health interventions that help people live a longer life in good health.

Even when we have enough money, our behavioral biases can get in the way — particularly our tendency to value present gratification over future gain.

"I'd honestly rather sit on the couch and eat the bag of crisps rather than go for the run," says Tanya Little, Vitality's chief growth officer. "And yet future me would thank me for going for the run now."

IDENTIFY ONE AREA FOR CHANGE

Similarly, we may choose inaction over action if we're asked to change too much, Little says. Instead, Vitality's programs identify one change that would have the biggest impact based on each person's health and lifestyle profile.



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

"This idea of an endless list is totally overwhelming and demotivating," Little says. "Whereas if I say to you, 'If you just did this one thing' ... you are much more likely to do it."

Once people make progress on a single goal, they're often inspired to change others, Little says. People who get more exercise often start to eat healthier, for

example.

Healthy habits don't make us immune to illness and disability, of course. But minding our health improves the odds we'll have many more years to enjoy.

If you'd like to see what Vitality recommends for you, as well as its estimate of your life and health spans, you can visit the company's calculator. □

Cyber Monday sales should be robust but business cooling



In this Nov. 29, 2010 file photo, a consumer looks at Cyber Monday sales on her computer at her home in Palo Alto, Calif. Associated Press

By **ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP Retail Writer
NEW YORK (AP) — Con-

sumers are expected to spend between \$10.2 billion and \$11.3 billion on

Monday, making it once again the biggest online shopping day of the year, according to Adobe Digital Economy Index.

Still, spending on what's known as Cyber Monday could drop from last year's level of \$10.8 billion as Americans are spreading out their deals more in response to discounting in October by retailers, according to Adobe, which analyzes more than one trillion visits to U.S. retail sites.

Both Black Friday and Thanksgiving Day online shopping came in below Adobe's prediction. On Black Friday, online sales reached \$8.9 billion, down from the \$9 billion in 2020, the second largest day of the year. On Thanksgiving Day, online sales reached \$5.1 billion, even from the year-ago period.

Adobe says it is the first time it has seen decreased spending on the big shopping days, which have seen healthy growth rates

since Adobe first began reporting on e-commerce in 2012.

For the first time, discounts compared with a year ago are expected to be weaker on Cyber Monday, a big theme this season given how supply chain clogs are creating challenges for retailers in bringing merchandise to stores. Still, Cyber Monday remains the best day to buy TVs with discount levels at 16%, compared with 19% discounts last year. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 40 Famed fur

1 Fire tycoon
remnants

6 Coffee land
additive

11 Tea cake close to

12 Banded rock
43 Like cacti

13 The Nina and the Pinta, e.g.

15 Toward the stern

16 — Moines

17 Maiden name label

18 Renege, perhaps

20 Summer cooler

21 Was a pioneer

22 Ventilation conduit

23 Fancy tie

26 Hay bundles

27 Campus area

28 Knight's address

29 Ornate vase

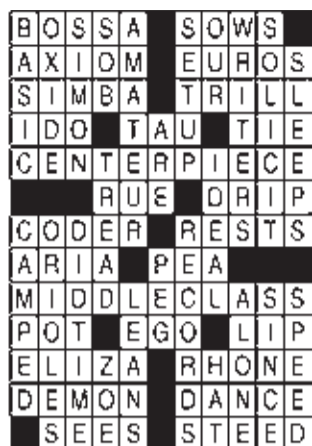
30 Parvenu

34 "I — Rock"

35 Take to court

36 Tell tales

37 James Hilton title character



Yesterday's answer

DOWN

1 Region of northern

2 Verne specialty

3 Party VIPs

4 Tolkien tree

5 Tiny start

6 Pert

7 "Gross!"

8 Lucrative

9 Content

10 Bristles at

14 Enjoy a novel

19 Proceed readers

22 Pub story

23 Superhero maybe

24 Conjecture

25 Two-deck game

26 Cuts in two

28 Goad on

30 Manual

31 Suspect's

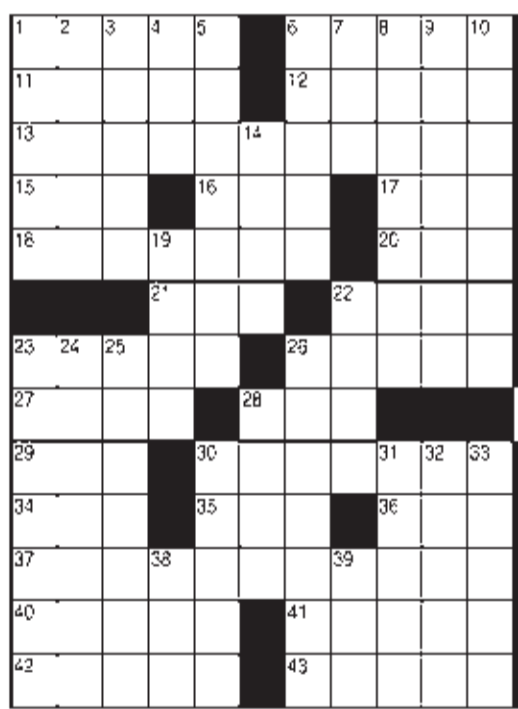
32 Turn red,

33 Irritable

38 Craggy hill

39 Femur's

upper end



11-30

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

11-30

CRYPTOQUOTE

XGD LDOFYUD NQ FYXDSRXCS
YULYORXDT XGD LDOFYUD NQ
R URXYNU; XGD XJN HDDZ
ZROD YU XGDYS LNJUJRS
XDULDUOV. — INGRUC
JNFQBRUB MNU BNDXGD

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW BADLY YOU PAINT SO LONG AS YOU DON'T PAINT BADLY LIKE OTHER PEOPLE. — GEORGE MOORE

EXPLAINER: What we know and don't know about omicron variant



Travelers wearing protective face masks arrive at Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, Israel, Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021.

Associated Press

By JAMEY KEATEN and
MARIA CHENG

Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The World Health Organization says it could still take some time to get a full picture of the threat posed by omicron, a new variant of the coronavirus as scientists worldwide scramble to assess its multiple mutations.

Stock markets swooned, some public gatherings got canceled, and countries across the globe suspended incoming flights after scientists in South Africa last week identified the new version that appears to have been behind a recent spike in COVID-19 infections in the country's most populous province.

Over the weekend, the list of countries that have spotted the new variant in travelers grew. Portugal detected 13 cases linked to the new variant among members of a single soccer club — only one of whom had recently traveled to South Africa.

On Friday, WHO designated it as a "variant of concern," its most serious designation of a COVID-19 variant, and called it "omicron" as the latest entry

into its Greek alphabet classification system designed to avoid stigmatizing countries of origin and simplify understanding.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OMICRON?

By Sunday, U.N. health agency issued a statement on omicron that boiled down to: We don't know much yet.

It said it wasn't clear whether omicron is more transmissible — more easily spread between people — compared to other variants like the highly transmissible delta variant. It said it wasn't clear if infection with omicron causes more severe disease, even as it cited data from South Africa showing rising rates of hospitalization there — but that could just be because more people are getting infected with COVID-19, not specifically omicron.

From just over 200 new confirmed cases per day in recent weeks, South Africa saw the number of new daily cases rocket to more than 3,200 on Saturday, most in Gauteng, the country's most populous province.

Now, up to 90% of the

new cases in Gauteng are caused by it, according to Tulio de Oliveira, director of the KwaZulu-Natal Research Innovation and Sequencing Platform.

"There is currently no information to suggest that symptoms associated with omicron are different from those from other variants," WHO said.

WHY ARE SCIENTISTS WORRIED ABOUT THIS NEW VARIANT?

So far, the main difference with other variants appears to be that there may be an increased risk of reinfection with omicron — in other words, that people who've already had COVID-19 could get reinfected more easily.

The variant appears to have a high number of mutations — about 30 — in the coronavirus' spike protein, which could affect how easily it spreads to people. Some experts say that could mean that vaccine makers may have to adapt their products at some point.

Sharon Peacock, who has led genetic sequencing of COVID-19 in Britain at the University of Cambridge, said the data so far suggest the new variant has mutations "consistent with enhanced transmissibility," but said that "the significance of many of the mutations is still not known."

Lawrence Young, a virologist at the University of Warwick, described omicron as "the most heavily mutated version of the virus we have seen," including potentially worrying changes never before seen all in the same virus.

WHAT SETS OMICRON APART?

Scientists know that omicron is genetically distinct from previous variants including the beta and delta variants, but don't know if these genetic changes make it any more transmissible or dangerous. So far, there is no indication the variant causes more severe disease. □

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Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey steps down as CEO

By **MICHELLE CHAPMAN**
AP Business Writer

Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey has stepped down as CEO of the social media platform. He has been succeeded by Twitter's current chief technology officer, Parag Agrawal. Dorsey will remain on the board until his term expires in 2022. Agrawal joined Twitter in 2011 and has been CTO since 2017. Twitter shares rose 5% to \$49.47 in morning trading after the announcement. Twitter was caught up in the heated political atmosphere leading up to the 2020 election, particularly when it banned former President Donald Trump following his incitement of the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol. Dorsey defended the move, saying Trump's tweets after the event resulted in a risk to public safety and created an "extraordinary and untenable circumstance" for the company. Trump sued the company, along with Facebook and YouTube, in July for alleged censorship. Critics argued that Twitter took too long to address hate speech, harassment and other harmful activity on its platform, particularly during the 2020 campaign. □

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'Encanto,' 'House of Gucci' fuel Thanksgiving box office



This image released by Disney shows Mirabel, voiced by Stephanie Beatriz, in a scene from the animated film "Encanto."

Associated Press

By JAKE COYLE

AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Thanksgiving weekend moviegoing was still far from the feast it normally is, but Disney's "Encanto" and the Lady Gaga-led "House of Gucci" both gave a lift to two genres that have been particularly battered by the pandemic: family movies and adult dramas.

"Encanto" led the box office with \$27 million over the weekend and \$40.3 million across the five-day holiday frame, according to studio estimates Sunday. While well off the pace of past Disney animated movies released over Thanksgiving — "Coco" launched at the same time of year with \$72 million and "Ralph Breaks the Internet" did as well with \$84 million — the result was the best opening for an animated movie during the pandemic.

Family films have been especially slow to bounce back, though with kids increasingly getting vaccinated, hopes have been rising that releases such as "Encanto" can lead a rebound. Disney earlier this year released films like Pixar's "Luca" straight to Disney+, but put out "Encanto," reportedly made for \$120 million, exclusively in theaters. The film, about a magical Colombia family and featuring original songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda, took in \$70 million globally. MGM's "House of Gucci," from director Ridley Scott, debuted with \$14.2 million over the three-day weekend and \$21.8 million across five days. That, too, was among the

best performances for an adult drama. Scott's own "The Last Duel," for Disney's 20th Century Studios, launched with a paltry \$4.8 million in October. The \$75 million-budgeted "House of Gucci," about the family behind the Italian fashion brand, features a large cast including Adam Driver, Jared Leto and Al Pacino. But its star, Lady Gaga, who plays Patrizia Reggiani, especially drove the turnout. According to MGM, 59% of the audience was female and 45% were between the ages of 18-35. About 34% were 45 years and older — a higher turnout among older moviegoers than most releases have seen. "Originality still counts in the public's mind," said Erik Loomis, distribution chief for MGM. "We were really pleased with the results. If you asked me going into the weekend, I was praying that the predictions were right because you just don't know today. You just don't know how the market's going to react." Thanksgiving weekend often accounts for around \$250 million in ticket sales domestically. Overall business this weekend came in at about \$142 million, according to data firm Comscore — a bit more than half of typical business but also almost seven times better than Thanksgiving 2020, when many theaters were still shuttered.

MGM has bet bigger on the theatrical recovery than most studios; its James Bond film "No Time to Die," with \$755 million globally, will rank as the No. 1 film of the year. Over the week-

end, MGM also released Paul Thomas Anderson's "Licorice Pizza," a coming-of-age romance starring Alana Haim and Cooper Hoffman, on four screens in 70mm for a per-screen average of \$83,852 — easily the best of the pandemic. "Licorice Pizza" expands wider in the coming weeks. "After all the talk of the reticence of certain demographics to go to the movie theater — more mature audiences and family audiences — both came out this weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for Comscore. "This Thanksgiving weekend at the box office should be very encouraging to the industry, for whom these audiences have been the toughest to bring back to movie theaters."

Still, every step forward for the movie industry this year has been accompanied by setbacks. The discovery of the new, potentially more contagious omicron variant sent shudders through Hollywood, which has been trying to build back moviegoing habits. Even as nations scrambled to enact new travel regulations because of the variant, experts cautioned that much is still unknown about the new strain. Last week's top film, "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" slid to second place with \$24.5 million in its second week after a modest 44% drop. The Sony Pictures release has grossed \$87.8 million domestically and \$28 million internationally. The studio's horror division, Screen Gems, also opened the R-rated "Resident Evil: Welcome to Raccoon City," a reboot in the now seven-film videogame adaptation franchise. It debuted with \$5.3 million for the three-day weekend and \$8.8 million for the holiday frame.

In its fourth weekend of release Marvel's "Eternals" added \$7.9 million in ticket sales over the three-day weekend to bring its North America cumulative total to \$150.6 million and \$368 million globally. □

Review: 'Small Things Like These' is a gem of a slim novel

By ROB MERRILL

Associated Press

"Small Things Like These" is a gem of a slim novel about a family man faced with a moral decision.

In just 114 pages, the book introduces readers to Bill Furlong, a coal merchant in a small Irish town. "Furlong had come from nothing," writes Keegan. His mother was just 16 when he was born after the Second World War and he never knew his father. They survived thanks to the kindness of his mother's employer, a wealthy widow with household staff. The year is 1985 and students of Irish history will glean something from the dedication: "This story is dedicated to the women and children who suffered time in Ireland's mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries." Readers ignorant of Irish history will have to wait for "A Note on the Text" at the end of the novel for some helpful context.

Context in advance or at the end, it's still a deeply moving tale. Furlong is the father of five girls, stuck in a bit of a rut. Up before the sun rises to supervise work at the coal yard, he lies in bed with his wife after the end of each long day, going over things that need doing or sharing bits of gossip he picked up during the day's deliveries. It's that simple act that gives the novel its title: "Some nights, Furlong lay there with Eileen, going over small things like these," writes Keegan.

But the smallest of things often have much bigger implications, as readers soon learn. Delivering coal one day to the local convent, Furlong happens upon "more than a dozen young women and girls, down on their hands and knees with tins of old-fashioned lavender polish and rags,



This cover image released by Grove shows "Small Things Like These" by Claire Keegan.

Associated Press

polishing their hearts out in circles on the floor." "Mister, won't you help us?" intones one of the girls, whose "hair had been roughly cut, as though someone blind had taken to it with shears." The encounter affects Furlong deeply and the latter half of the novel finds him reflecting on his own upbringing as he builds toward his decision. Will he stay silent or will he help?

Keegan's economy of prose is a marvel. Here's Furlong, back at the convent, about to meet the Mother Superior: "Furlong looked down at the dark shining river whose surface reflected equal parts of the lighted town. So many things had a way of looking finer, when they were not so close. He could not say which he rathered: the sight of town or its reflection in the water."

The book takes just an hour or so to read, but you still feel like you know Bill Furlong by the end and understand why he does what he does. His tale of quiet heroism doesn't require any more words. □

AP source: Scherzer and Mets agree to \$130M, 3-year contract

By **RONALD BLUM**
AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Max Scherzer has shattered baseball's record for highest average salary, agreeing Monday to a \$130 million, three-year contract with the New York Mets, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement is subject to a successful physical.

The \$43.33 million average salary is 20% higher than the previous mark, the \$36 million Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole is averaging in his \$324 million, nine-year contract with New York.

Scherzer would have the right to opt out after the 2023 season to become a free agent once again.

Scherzer also receives a full no-trade provision, requiring his approval for any deals. The agreement also includes award bonuses.

Scherzer lives in West Palm Beach, Florida, about an hour's drive from the Mets spring training complex in Port St. Lucie. He was planning to take a physical Monday that is needed for the deal to be completed. A three-time Cy Young Award winner and eight-time All-Star, the 37-year-



Los Angeles Dodgers' Max Scherzer pitches against the San Francisco Giants during the ninth inning of Game 5 of a baseball National League Division Series Thursday, Oct. 14, 2021, in San Francisco.

Associated Press

old right-hander was 15-4 with a 2.46 ERA last season for the Washington Nationals and Los Angeles Dodgers, who acquired him on July 30. He struck out 236 and walked 36 in 179 1/3 innings, averaging 94.4 mph with his fastball in the final season of a \$210 million, seven-year contract that included \$105 million in deferred money payable from 2022-28.

He is 190-97 with a 3.16 ERA in 14 major league seasons

for Arizona (2008-09), Detroit (2010-14), Washington and the Dodgers. He has distinctive eyes, blue on the right, brown on the left, a condition known as Heterochromia Iridis.

A workhorse who helped the Nationals win the 2019 World Series title, Scherzer won the AL Cy Young in 2013 and consecutive NL Cy Youngs in 2016 and 2017. He finished third in this year's voting behind Milwaukee's Corbin Burnes

and Philadelphia's Zack Wheeler. He has pitched a pair of no-hitters, in 2015 against Pittsburgh and at the Mets. Scherzer gets \$43,333,333 annually. The Mets deal will raise his career earnings to more than \$370 million. He joins a rotation headed by two-time Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom, who didn't pitch after July 7 because of right forearm tightness. Carlos Carrasco and Taijuan Walker also return un-

der club control. Noah Syndergaard, returning from Tommy John surgery, left for a \$21 million, one-year contract with the Los Angeles Angels. The Mets lost out on left-hander Steven Matz, whose \$44 million, four-year contract with the St. Louis Cardinals was to be finalized Monday.

New York also has pending deals with center fielder Starling Marte (\$78 million for four years), outfielder/first baseman Mark Canha and infielder Eduardo Escobar, all contingent on successful physicals.

The Mets had baseball's third-highest payroll on Aug. 31 at \$196 million, trailing the Dodgers (\$261 million) and Yankees (\$204 million). They could emerge as the top spender following their first full offseason under owner Steven Cohen, who bought the team in November 2020 from the Wilpon and Katz families in a deal that valued the Mets at a baseball-record \$2.42 billion. As baseball heads to a likely lockout when the collective bargaining agreement expires Wednesday night, Scherzer is a member of the union's eight-player executive subcommittee. His agreement, like Cole's, was negotiated by agent Scott Boras. □

Red Sox owners reach agreement to buy Pittsburgh Penguins

By **WILL GRAVES**
AP Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Fenway Sports Group has reached an agreement with the Pittsburgh Penguins that would give the conglomerate controlling interest in one of the NHL's marquee franchises.

The Penguins announced Monday that the two sides have come to terms on a deal, which would need to be approved by the NHL's Board of Governors. A decision is expected by the end of the year.

As part of the deal, Penguins Hall of Famer Mario Lemieux and co-owner Ron Burkle will remain part of the franchise's owner-

ship group. There will be no immediate changes to Pittsburgh's management structure. CEO David Morehouse, general manager Ron Hextall, president of hockey operations Brian Burke and head coach Mike Sullivan will all remain in their current positions.

"The Pittsburgh Penguins are a premier National Hockey League franchise with a very strong organization, a terrific history and a vibrant, passionate fan base," FSG Chairman Tom Werner said in a statement. "We will work diligently to continue building on the remarkable Penguins' tradition of championships and exciting play."

The Penguins have won five Stanley Cups during their history, including three since Lemieux and Burkle took over a financially strapped franchise in 1999. Pittsburgh has reached the playoffs 15 consecutive years, the longest active streak in major North American professional sports.

"As the Penguins enter a new chapter, I will continue to be as active and engaged with the team as I always have been and look forward to continuing to build on our success with our incoming partners at FSG," Lemieux said in a statement. "They have an organizational philosophy that mirrors the approach



Pittsburgh Penguins' Sidney Crosby (87) returns to the bench after scoring during the third period of an NHL hockey game against the Montreal Canadiens in Pittsburgh, Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021.

Associated Press

that worked so well for Ron and me over the past 22 years." The Penguins have steadied themselves following a bumpy start to the 2021-22 season. Pittsburgh has won five of six heading into a four-game road trip

that starts Monday in Calgary. FSG, which owns Major League Baseball's Boston Red Sox and Liverpool of the Premier League, had been looking to add another major sports franchise to its portfolio. □



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Analysis: The pass seduces even the NFL's best run teams

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

Throwing the football in the NFL is so alluring it can seduce even the best run teams.

The Indianapolis Colts forgot they have Jonathan Taylor after relying on Carson Wentz's arm to build a 10-point halftime lead against the defending Super Bowl champion Buccaneers.

The Philadelphia Eagles climbed into the playoff race because of a potent rushing attack and let Jalen Hurts throw it away against the Giants.

The Baltimore Ravens and Cleveland Browns combined for five turnovers on pass plays in the second quarter Sunday night. Lamar Jackson threw three picks. Baker Mayfield and wide receiver Jarvis Landry fumbled on sacks.

If the Ravens didn't play against the Browns, the NFL's five top running teams would've lost in Week 12.



Indianapolis Colts' Jonathan Taylor (28) is tackled by Tampa Bay Buccaneers' Sean Murphy-Bunting (23) and Lavonte David (54) during the first half of an NFL football game, Sunday, Nov. 28, 2021, in Indianapolis.

Associated Press

The Tennessee Titans, who entered with the league's fifth-ranked rushing offense, kept rolling on the ground with 270 yards, but they were blown out by the Patriots 36-13.

Most baffling was the Colts' play calling in the second half.

Facing the league's stingiest run defense, Indianapolis couldn't get Taylor going early. The Buccaneers (8-3) weren't going to allow Taylor, the league's first 1,000-yard rusher this season, to beat them. They dared the Colts to throw, and Wentz responded with three per-

fect touchdown passes in the first half for a 24-14 lead. The Colts (6-6) got the ball to start the third quarter and kept on throwing. Wentz dropped back on 26 straight plays at one point, including the final eight plays in the second quarter. The results in the second half were disastrous. Shaquil Barrett's strip-sack of Wentz led to a touchdown for Tampa Bay. Wentz then threw a pick on a deep ball in which Antoine Winfield Jr. made a leaping grab over Michael Pittman Jr. That led to another touchdown for the Bucs.

When the Colts finally handed it to Taylor again in the fourth quarter, he gained 58 yards on eight carries, including a game-tying TD. But Tom Brady then led the Buccaneers on the winning drive with Leonard Fournette scoring his fourth TD of the game for a 38-31 victory.

Why didn't Taylor run the ball on the first three pos-

sessions of the second half? "We were rolling," Colts coach Frank Reich said. "We tried to run it in the first quarter, this is the No. 1 run defense, and we weren't getting anything. We tried throwing in the second quarter and started having a lot of success. Carson was hot. Called a bunch of RPOs that got to throws because they were throw reads. We come out in the third quarter, we move the ball well in the third quarter. We moved down there twice, we're moving it well."

The Colts became enamored with the pass because it was working, but the turnovers ended up hurting them. Perhaps, giving the ball to Taylor in the third quarter would've allowed Indianapolis to extend the lead and avoid those costly mistakes.

"When we turn it over, it gives them life," Reich said. "That's No. 1. No. 2, they have Tom Brady." □